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Introduction

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Leibniz never wrote a magnum opus. His books were generally limited in scope (e.g., the *Dynamics* and *Theodicy*), and the one exception (the *New Essays*) is shaped as much by Leibniz's desire to show the inadequacies in Locke's views as by his desire to provide an exposition of his own philosophy. Where Leibniz did present surveys of his philosophy, these took the form of essays which were published in the journals of the day or which lay hidden from public view until after his death. And these essays, even the most famous ones such as the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, the *New System*, and the *Monadology*, provide little more than brief, and often exasperating, sketches. Nowhere do we find the likes of Descartes's *Meditations*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, or Locke's *Essay*.

The task of understanding Leibniz's philosophy would be a difficult one, to say the least, were it not for an additional fact. For Leibniz was unlike his contemporaries in another way, namely in the extent to which he was willing to engage in philosophical discussion through the medium of correspondence. To be sure, students of other major figures have letters available to them. For example, eighty-four letters between Spinoza and his correspondents have survived – although almost half of these were written to Spinoza rather than by him. And Descartes left a larger body of correspondence consisting of just over six hundred letters, around five hundred of which were written by Descartes himself. However, even Descartes's output does not begin to compare with that of Leibniz.

Leibniz was a prolific correspondent. His *Nachlass* contains over fifteen thousand letters from over one thousand correspondences (see LBr: Vorwort). Many of these are not directly concerned with philosophy; however, there are large numbers which do pertain to this subject. Even using

a conservative estimate, the descriptions of Leibniz's correspondences in Bodemann's catalog (LBr: passim) suggest over one hundred which deal directly with philosophy. But it is not merely the volume of Leibniz's epistolary output that is of importance here. For it is clear from even the most cursory readings that his discussions are often very detailed and, sometimes, extremely candid.

The significance of Leibniz's philosophical correspondence was recognized early. Leibniz himself suggested that his correspondence with Antoine Arnauld might be published (see GP I, 420 and Barber 1955: 258), and his correspondence with Samuel Clarke was published by Clarke in 1717, the year after Leibniz's death (Clarke 1717), and again in French three years later (Desmaizeaux 1720). Editions of two more of Leibniz's philosophical correspondences – with Johann Bernoulli (Anonymous 1745) and with Johann Schmid (Veesenmeyer 1788) – appeared before the end of the eighteenth century, and between 1734 and 1742 Christian Korholt published his four-volume collection *Viri Illustriss. Godefridi Guil. Leibnitii EPISTOLAE AD DIVERSOS*, which contains nearly five hundred of Leibniz's letters (Korholt 1734–42).[1]

Material from Leibniz's correspondences made its way into scholarly studies of his work early on. The pioneering works of commentators such as Foucher de Careil (1905), Russell (1937), Couturat (1901), and Cassirer (1902) are replete with references and discussion. This attention has continued to the present day. However, for the most part, discussion of material from Leibniz's letters has taken place without serious concern for the surrounding correspondences. Usually, scholars draw attention just to individual passages which help support a thesis about Leibniz's views on a given issue. Sometimes there is an account of the immediate context in which a point arises, but it is rare to find any serious attempt to examine its place within the correspondence from which it was taken. This kind of focus is only natural. Such attention to detail is likely to be inappropriate and a hindrance when an author has as his or her goal a general study or treatment of Leibniz's views on a particular topic. However, the present volume is predicated on the idea that we have much to gain from taking a closer look at the correspondences themselves.

Leibniz's philosophical correspondences often provide us with detailed discussion of his views on a number of closely related issues. The selection of topics is given to us, and, if we focus on the correspondence as a whole, we find ourselves in the enviable position of knowing which issues were deemed relevant by Leibniz and his contemporaries for a proper understanding of the topics at hand. In addition, the existence

of a correspondent (generally with opposing views) to whom Leibniz must explain and justify his opinions often leads to a more thorough and detailed exposition than we find in his other writings.

The chapters in this volume certainly are not the first to deal with Leibniz's correspondences. Indeed, each of Leibniz's two most famous correspondences has had an entire monograph devoted to it in recent years – see Robert Sleigh's *Leibniz and Arnauld* (1990) and Ezio Vailati's *Leibniz and Clarke* (1997). However, this approach is still comparatively rare. Sleigh's book has been recognized widely as one of the most successful English language studies of Leibniz ever written. His closely contextualized reading of the Arnauld correspondence has revealed much that was previously unknown about the subtlety and complexity of Leibniz's thought in the late 1680s. Furthermore, many of these discoveries are a direct consequence of the close attention that Sleigh pays to the dialectical structure of the correspondence. The to and fro between the philosophers is an essential key to understanding the views which Leibniz espouses. One could hardly ask for better advertisement for the fruitfulness of the study of Leibniz's correspondences than Sleigh's book.

Sleigh and Vailati devote entire books to a single correspondence. The aims of this volume are, necessarily, more limited in scope. However, it is hoped that by drawing attention to the philosophical significance of a number of Leibniz's correspondences, the chapters in this collection will stimulate further interest in the exploration of those that have not yet been studied in depth. Although one chapter (by Martha Bolton) revisits the Arnauld correspondence, the remainder draw our attention to discussions with contemporaries who are less well known (although most will be familiar to Leibniz scholars). The volume makes no pretense of offering anything close to an exhaustive coverage of the many interesting philosophical correspondences in which Leibniz engaged. Indeed, there is no chapter on the Clarke correspondence, arguably the most famous of them all. Although the aim is to provide a wide-ranging collection, the selection of correspondences was determined largely by the interests of the contributors.

Seven of the eleven chapters in this volume are successors to papers that were presented at the conference *Leibniz and His Correspondents*, held at Tulane University in March 2001. The remaining chapters were solicited later. In each case, the contributor was asked to focus on a single correspondence and to present an original essay that illuminates Leibniz as a philosopher. The result is testimony to the different ways in which we may learn from these writings. Sometimes, the lessons are based on

detailed analysis of the arguments of Leibniz and his correspondents in service of some tightly delineated claim. Other times, we learn more of the way in which Leibniz the philosopher moved through the Republic of Letters and other socio-political contexts while trying to establish himself and his views. Often we learn some of both. However, the reader should not expect to find much in the way of what Robert Sleigh has called "philosophical history" (1990: 2–3), where the aims of the author are to use the writings of a historical figure to illuminate a philosophical issue or discuss a topic "in the company" of such a figure. The primary goal of each of the chapters herein is to provide discussion which will allow the reader to understand the philosophy of Leibniz more adequately, whether this is through a detailed articulation of his philosophical views or by providing new information about the intellectual and socio-political contexts that shaped his philosophy.

The chapters are arranged chronologically, based on the starting dates of the correspondences with which they are concerned. For the purposes of introducing the volume, I will illuminate some of the broader themes that link them together. To this end, I shall discuss the chapters in three groups. However, readers will discover many other points of comparison which would allow for different groupings. It should also be noted that many of the chapters impinge directly on our understanding of the work of other important philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Locke, Kant, Arnauld, Wolff, and Foucher. Furthermore, the chapters which are concerned with the correspondences with lesser figures, such as Des Bosses and Princess Caroline, often address issues that are central to the relationship between Leibniz's philosophy and major philosophical movements of the time, such as Jesuit Scholasticism and Newtonianism.

The first group of chapters consists of writings by Stuart Brown, Christia Mercer, and myself. Each chapter provides a wide-ranging discussion based on an entire correspondence and investigates the philosophical themes which arise as Leibniz interacts with proponents of a major school of seventeenth-century philosophy. Stuart Brown considers the philosophical relationship between Leibniz and the skeptic Simon Foucher. Brown argues that this was underpinned by an alliance based on what Leibniz and Foucher believed was common philosophical ground and on the value they attached to what each thought the other aimed to accomplish in philosophy. He traces the alliance from its strong beginnings to its eventual dissolution. Leibniz was initially enthusiastic about Foucher's skeptical posture, but this eventually gave way to the belief

that his pre-occupation with the Academic Skeptics was an obstacle to Foucher's declared aim of seeking truth and making progress in philosophy. Foucher, for his part, hoped for a constructive and demonstrated alternative to Cartesianism and was disappointed by what he saw as the hypothetical nature of Leibniz's *New System* and its accommodation to a Cartesian problematic. The correspondence offers a fresh perspective on both philosophers as well as on the way in which Leibniz attempts to draw on the skeptical tradition in fine-tuning his own epistemology.

Christia Mercer provides an account of the interchange between the German humanist Jakob Thomasius, who had been Leibniz's teacher at Leipzig. According to Mercer, Leibniz acquired from Thomasius a commitment to a historically based "conciliatory eclecticism," a belief in the soundness of the Aristotelian philosophy, and his familiarity with Platonism. By examining the whole correspondence, Mercer argues for two closely related points. (1) Despite his innovations, Leibniz's philosophical goal was unremittingly conservative: He intended to borrow ideas from all the great philosophical schools to construct a true system that would effect intellectual peace. Furthermore, (2) despite his radical departure from Thomasius on some issues, he remained committed to the conservative philosophical goal inherited from his master. According to Mercer, once we take seriously the philosophical lessons that Thomasius bequeathed to his student, we can resolve the apparent tension between Leibniz's innovation and his conservatism.

In my chapter, I provide an overview of Leibniz's criticisms of, and responses to, Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology as they appear in the correspondence with Burchard de Volder. I examine the ways in which the correspondence develops against the backdrop of De Volder's version of the Cartesian philosophy and from his initial request for a naturalistic account of the causes of bodily motion. Along the way, Leibniz and De Volder lock horns over issues which include the appropriate methodology for determining the nature of body, the proper analysis of the nature of substance, and the extent to which Cartesianism is able to explain the phenomena which we associate with bodies. My chapter illustrates the ways in which De Volder's lines of questioning and responses are a necessary condition for a proper understanding of Leibniz's views. Furthermore, with this background in place, I raise a number of questions regarding the success of Leibniz's critique.

The chapters in the second group, which consists of essays by Philip Beeley, Franklin Perkins, and Gregory Brown, again provide accounts of a number of issues that arise within entire correspondences. They differ

from the chapters of the first group in that each considers a correspondence in which Leibniz's philosophical views are articulated within explicitly social and political contexts. Philip Beeley examines the nature of Leibniz's relation to Henry Oldenburg, the Secretary of the Royal Society, as it emerges from their correspondence in the 1670s. Three central topics of their correspondence form the focal points of the investigation. The first two are the discussions between the two men about the *Hypothesis physica nova* and the *Theoria motus abstracti* – the publications through which Leibniz made his first appearance on the European stage. Beeley's discussion of the correspondence uncovers the general aims and epistemological foundations of these works, as well as allowing for greater insight into the reasons for Leibniz's acceptance by the English scientific community. The third topic of discussion on which Beeley focuses is the universal characteristic. The characteristic is much less prominent in the letters which passed between the two men, reflecting Leibniz's general reticence at disclosing details of a project on which he had worked on and off since his eighteenth year. Nonetheless, important details emerge which are helpful in understanding conceptual developments within this project that took place in the 1670s.

Franklin Perkins's chapter is concerned with Leibniz's correspondence with several of the Jesuits who were part of the mission to China. For Perkins, the correspondence exemplifies the way in which Leibniz's philosophy, unlike the views of many of his contemporaries, provides a basis for comparative philosophy and cultural exchange. Indeed, Perkins claims that Leibniz stands alone among early modern philosophers in promoting an imperative not just to tolerate but to seek out and learn from other cultures. Perkins begins by analyzing the epistemological foundation for comparative philosophy, in particular Leibniz's conception of the relationship between reason and experience. Then he investigates the role of these ideas in the correspondence with the Jesuits. Perkins argues that, side by side, each sheds light on the other and illuminates the ways in which Leibniz's metaphysics and epistemology serve his practical, social concerns.

Gregory Brown introduces the philosophical, personal, and political dimensions of the correspondence between Leibniz and Princess Caroline, Princess of Wales (and future Queen of England). The correspondence provides insight into Leibniz's relations with the Newtonians in the last years of his life. Brown considers how the priority over the discovery of the calculus shaped the tone and substance of the correspondence between Leibniz and Caroline, and, ultimately, precipitated

the famous, and much discussed, exchange between Leibniz and Clarke. In addition, he examines the way in which Leibniz's arguments against atomism and the existence of the void lost their force over Caroline once she was living in England and the attendant failure of Leibniz to propagate his *Theodicy* in English translation. Brown's chapter provides a fascinating glimpse into Leibniz's philosophical personality and his relations with the courts in Hanover, England, and Vienna during the last years of his life.

The third group of chapters consists of those by Martha Brandt Bolton, Brandon Look, Daniel Garber, Donald Rutherford, and Pauline Phemister. These chapters focus on philosophical issues that receive detailed discussion in a particular correspondence. Through careful consideration of the dialectical context, new light is shed on some familiar (in the case of Phemister, less familiar) topics. Within this third group, it is useful to note connections between some of the chapters. Martha Brandt Bolton and Brandon Look both consider the vexed question of the nature of corporeal substance in Leibniz's philosophy by turning to two of the correspondences in which this is discussed in most detail.

Bolton's chapter tracks the part of Leibniz's correspondence with Antoine Arnauld generated by Leibniz's contention that in order that the body or matter not be a simple phenomenon, like the rainbow, nor an entity united by accident or by aggregation, like a heap of stones, it cannot consist of extension, and there must, necessarily, be something there which one calls substantial form and which corresponds in a way to what one calls the soul. Bolton draws on the details of the exchange that followed this claim to examine Leibniz's position as a response to two questions that Arnauld posed: (1) why exactly Leibniz thought that what is extended, merely as such, cannot be a substance (or be real, in its own right); and (2) how Leibniz thought soul-like substantial forms could overcome this barrier to substantiality and reality. Through careful examination of Arnauld's questioning, Bolton argues that Leibniz endorsed an ontology admitting nothing whatsoever except substances which come up to the highest standard of unity. In two short paragraphs in his last responsive letter, Leibniz indicated how he proposed to bring this off – although he did virtually nothing to explain his solution. Bolton argues that it yields a theory of composite (corporeal) substances that promises to come up to his standard of unity.

Look's chapter examines the correspondence with Jesuit Bartholomew Des Bosses. He shows how, in the course of this correspondence, Leibniz is pushed to show the relation and reconciliation, if possible, of his doctrine

of monads with standard Scholastic and Catholic metaphysical doctrines. The best-known and most notorious outcome of the dialectic between Leibniz and Des Bosses is Leibniz's putative concession of the existence of a "vinculum substantiale," or substantial bond, which unites monads and which, ultimately, makes transubstantiation possible. However, Look argues that a closer examination of this correspondence makes manifest on a deeper level Leibniz's struggle with and recognition of certain difficulties in his metaphysics. The chapter focuses on two related issues in the correspondence that have not received as much attention as they deserve: (1) Leibniz's account of composite substance, focusing on his explanation of the nature of primitive active and passive powers; and (2) Leibniz's account of relations within the Des Bosses correspondence and, in particular, an examination of the sense in which Leibniz appeals to a "more perfect" relation between monads made possible by the "vinculum substantiale."

Daniel Garber and Donald Rutherford investigate Leibniz's commitment to idealism at different points in his career by investigating key interchanges. Garber deviates slightly from the rest of the contributors by considering the record of a direct interchange between Leibniz and Michelangelo Fardella. Although Fardella was one of Leibniz's correspondents for many years, the focus of the chapter is a document that purports to represent some of the contents of their conversations from their first meeting in 1690. However, Garber also sets this discussion within the broader context of a discussion of the idiosyncratic Cartesian assumptions that Fardella brings to this interchange. The primary aim is to gauge the import of the document for debates about Leibniz's idealism. Garber achieves this through a careful examination of the dialectical context. He contends, in contrast to previous scholars, that there may well be no evidence of idealism in Leibniz's exchange with Fardella and, by extension, none in other writings from Leibniz's "middle period."

Idealism is again at issue in Donald Rutherford's discussion of the correspondence with Christian Wolff. Rutherford begins his chapter with the observation that Immanuel Kant regarded Leibniz's monadology as at least a coherent attempt to reason about a supersensible reality of things in themselves. He believes that Kant's reading of Leibniz's monadology is largely correct, and he employs it in exploring what he sees as the central philosophical issue at stake in Leibniz's correspondence with Christian Wolff. The thesis, simply put, is this: Leibniz is an idealist and Wolff is not. Through an examination of their correspondence, Rutherford shows that very early in his career Wolff was offered an entry into the inner recesses

of Leibniz's philosophy and politely declined the invitation. Thereafter, in his mature writings, Wolff justified this refusal with a philosophical system which makes clear his differences with Leibniz. This is a piece of philosophical history interesting in its own right, but Rutherford also uses it to reinforce the thesis that Leibniz's late philosophy is conceived properly as a version of metaphysical idealism, a reading on which he claims Kant as an ally.

Finally, Pauline Phemister explores Leibniz's use of the Principle of Uniformity in his correspondence with Lady Masham. She suggests that Leibniz's appeal to the Principle and the underlying empiricism with its Lockean-sounding appeals to sensation and reflection are inspired by Leibniz's desire to engage in philosophical debate with Locke (who was living in Masham's household at the time). Phemister also argues that the application of the Principle produces highly suspect conclusions when the appeals to sensation and reflection are made in an essentially Lockean fashion. However, she claims that when Leibniz's empiricism is understood as grounded ultimately in an ontological thesis that emphasizes the foundational reality of the living creature, comprising a mind, soul, or form theoretically capable of self-reflection, as well as a physical, sensing body, the arguments using the Principle of Uniformity are much more successful. Phemister argues that, in the end, the position advanced by Leibniz bears more resemblance to that of Ralph Cudworth, Lady Masham's father, than it does to that of Locke.

Note

1. Although the works mentioned here are the most important ones, other letters by Leibniz were published during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – see Ravier 1937: 115–301.

2

Leibniz and His Master

The Correspondence with Jakob Thomasius

Christia Mercer

In the spring of 1661, at the age of fourteen, Leibniz began his studies at the university in Leipzig where he came under the influence of Jakob Thomasius, a well-known German philosopher. Thomasius, who became the young man's mentor and adviser, was born in Leipzig in 1622, attended university there, and eventually became Professor of Rhetoric, Dialectic, and Moral Philosophy.[1] Before his death in 1684, he published in all the main areas of philosophy and directed dissertations on a wide range of topics. He was considered an "erudite" historian of philosophy, an important conciliator, and "a most recognized" philosopher (Sturm 1686: 72–3). Leibniz calls him "the most celebrated German Peripatetic" (A VI ii, 426) and refers to him as "our most famous Thomasius" (A VI i, 300). In April 1669, Leibniz wrote a letter to Thomasius in which he argues for the reconciliation of the Aristotelian and the mechanical philosophies, and for a conception of substance that would effect that reconciliation. He published the letter the next year, and it, thereby, became the young man's first public presentation of his newly developed theory of substance.[2] The title given to the letter is revealing: "Letter to a Man of the Most Refined Learning Concerning the Reconcilability of Aristotle and the Moderns." In the remainder of Leibniz's long life, he wrote thousands of letters to hundreds of people. Of all his correspondences, none is more important to an understanding of the sources and goals of his philosophical project than the one with his esteemed professor.

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